

Message Text

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41

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 EB-11 SAM-01 FSI-01 PM-07 INR-10

IO-14 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 DRC-01 DPW-01

PRS-01 OMB-01 SS-20 SSO-00 INRE-00 /121 W

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O R 201050Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1879

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

USDEL JEC PARIS

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CINCUSARPAC
DEPCHIEF JUSMAAG UDORN
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USDAO SAIGON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 SAIGON 02225

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFLOR, ECON, VS
SUBJECT: EMBASSY SAIGON'S MISSION WEEKLY, FEBRUARY 14 -20, 1974

BANGKOK ALSO PASS OSA; DEPT ALSO FOR AID/W; CINCPAC FOR POLAD;
DOD PRO USAJFKCMA ATTN: ATCS-WL-DSA

THE WEEK IN SUMMARY

--THE CEASEFIRE

--GVN CABINET CHANGE BRINGS ONLY A FEW NEW FACES

--COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA REACTION TO CABINET SUFFLE

--CONTINUING REACTION TO THE PARACELS-SPRATLY ISSUE

--CHINESE PRESS COMMENDED

--GVN/"PRG" BILATERALS STILL ON DEAD CENTER

--RETURN OF GVN PERSONNEL CAPTURED IN PARACELS

--GVN REASSERTS CLAIM TO PARACELS AND SPRATLY ISLANDS

--GVN AND PHILIPPINES FAVOR DIRECT TALKS ON SPRATLYS

--GVN-SAUDI ARABIA ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

--HIGH FUEL COSTS HURTING FISHING

--IMPORT CREDIT RESTRICTION CLAMPED ON

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--JANUARY TAX COLLECTIONS SOAR

--PRICES

--BLACK MARKET CURRENCY AND GOLD PRICES

I. INTERNAL

A. THE CEASEFIRE

AFTER FOUR WEEKS OF VERY LITTLE MILITARY ACTIVITY, MR-1 REGISTERED A HIGH-PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN CEASE-FIRE VIOLATIONS, WITH MOST OF THE ACTION SOUTH OF THE HAI VAN PASS. THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY HELD STEADY IN MR-2, WHERE THERE WERE NO MAJOR CONTACTS AND AN OVERALL DECLINE IN CASUALTIES. INCIDENTS IN MR-3 LEVELLED OFF WITH A RETURN TO MORE NORMAL ACTIVITY IN HAU NGHIA PROVINCE. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, CONSIDERABLE ACTIVITY BY ENEMY SAPPER UNITS ON WATERWAYS AND AGAINST STRATEGIC INSTALLATIONS AND HEAVY ATTACKS-BY-FIRE ON GVN ENCLAVES IN BINH LONG PROVINCE. THE SHARP RISE IN ACTIVITY IN MR-4 INCLUDED A FOUR-FOLD INCREASE IN GROUND ATTACKS, WITH A BIG SURGE OCCURRING OVER THE WEEKEND IN THE SOUTHERN DELTA, ESPECIALLY IN KIEN GIANG. IN THE OTHERWISE QUIET NORTHERN DELTA, THE GVN ON FEBRUARY 16 LAUNCHED A FOUR-PRONGED MULTI-REGIMENT ATTACK AGAINST THE VC/NVA TRI PHAP REDOUBT. AGREEMENT ON FEB 19 ON THE SECOND PHASE OF THE GVN/PRG PERSONNEL RELEASES SHOULD CARRY THE RELEASES THROUGH FEB 26 WITHOUT INTERRUPTION. US AND DRV HAVE AGREED ON FLIGHT PROCEDURES FOR THE SAIGON-HANOR LIAISON FLIGHT. ICCS DIRECTOR NUR AND POLISH AMBASSADOR KULAGA WILL BOTH SOON BE LEAVING, AND THE INDONESIANS HAVE ANNOUNCED A REDUCTION IN THE SIZE OF THEIR DELEGATION.

B. GVN CABINET CHANGE BRINGS ONLY A FEW NEW FACES

ON FEB 18 THE ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCED A NEW CABINET. TWO DAYS BEFORE THE PRESIDENT HAD REQUESTED THE RESIGNATION OF ALL MINISTERS SAVE PRIME MINISTER TRAN THIEN KHIEM. THE NEW CABINET IS THE SMALLEST EVER IN THE THIEU ADMINISTRATION, WITH THREE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS AND 13 CABINET MINISTERS. THERE WERE MORE STRUCTURAL CHANGES THAN PERSONNEL CHANGES. MOST OF THE INCUMBENTS WERE REAPPOINTED.

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THERE ARE TWO ADDITIONAL DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS, AND THE CHIEU HOI AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIOS WERE ABOLISHED AND MERGED WITH THE INFORMATION AND INTERIOR MINISTREY RESPECTIVELY. THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR INFORMATION AND THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CIVIL SERVICE HAVE BEEN TAKEN OUT OF THE PRESIDENCY AND PLACED UNDER THE PRIME MINISTER.

DEPARTING THE SCENE WERE: MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY PARTY FIGURE MGUYEMSVAN NGAI; MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH TRAN MINH TUNG (HE HEADED THE VICTORIOUS DEMOCRACY SLATE IN THE 1973 UPPER HOUSE ELECTIONS AND WILL PRESUMABLY RETURN TO HIS SENATE SEAT); MINISTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE TRAN NGUON PHIEU; MINISTER OF JUSTICE LE VAN THU; COMMISSIONER GENERAL FOR PLANNING PHAM KIM NGOC; AND MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' PHAN QUAN DONG. (DONG HAD BEEN DISMISSED TWO DAYS BEFORE THE REST OF THE

CABINET RESIGNED, AFTER HE WAS PUBLICLY LINKED TO ILLEGAL
GAMBLING OPERATIONS IN SAIGON.) NEW TO THE CABINET OR HOLDING

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1880

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AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

UMJSL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3497

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 SAIGON 02225

BANGKOK ALSO PASS OSA; DEPT ALSO FOR AID/W; CINCPAC FOR POLAD;
DOD PRO USAJFKCMA ATTN: ATCS-WL-DSA

DIFFERENT PORTFOLIOS ARE: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SPECIALLY IN CHARGE OF INSPECTING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS TRAN VAN DON (DON IS NEW TO THE CABINET AND HIS POST IS A NEW ONE WITH STILL UNDEFINED RESPONSIBILITIES. A RETIRED LIEUTENANT GENERAL AND FORMER SENATOR, DON HAS BEEN CHAIRMAN OF THE LOWER HOUSE NATIONAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE SINCE HIS ELECTION TO THE LOWER HOUSE IN 1971); DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND CONCURRENTLY MINISTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE SPECIALLY IN CHARGE OF LAND RECLAMATION AND HAMLET CONSTRUCTION DR. PHAN QUANG DAN (THE POSITION IS A NEW ONE, BUT DAN HAS BEEN MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAND CLEARANCE AND HAMLET ESTABLISHMENT, A POST IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE CONCERNED WITH REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, SINCE 1971); MINISTER OF JUSTICE DUONG DUC THUY (THUY IS NEW. HE HAS BEEN SPEICAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR LEGAL AFFAIRS SINCE LATE 1967); MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CHIEU HOI HOANG DUC NHA (NHA HAS BEEN COMMISSIONER GENERAL OF STATE FOR INFORMATION SINCE JANUARY 1973. HE NOW BECOMES A MINISTER WITH WHAT WERE PREVIOUSLY TWO PORTFOLIOS AND BECOMES SUBORDINATE TO THE PRIME MINISTER RATHER THAN THE PRESIDENT. IT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT NHA WILL REMAIN PRESIDENTIAL PRIVATE AND PRESS SECRETARY, RESPONSIBILITES HE HAS DISCHARGED IN THE PAST); MINISTER OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS DR. HO VAN CHAM (DR. CHAM HAS BEEN DHIEU HOI MINISTER SINCE SEPTEMBER 1969); MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH DR. NGUYEN VAN HUON. (HUON IS NEW TO THE CABINET. A FORMER ARVAN MEDICAL OFFICER, HUON HAS BEEN DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MEDICAL EXPERIMENTAL CENTER IN GIA DINH PROVINCE OUTSIDE SAIGON); COMMISSIONER GENERAL FOR PLANNING NGUYEN TIEN HUNG (HUNG IS NEW. HE IS AN AMERICAN-EDUCATED ECONOMIST WHO WHORKED WITH THE IMF IN WASHINGTON UNTIL MID-1973 WHEN HE RETURNED TO SAIGON TO BECOME SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL PLANNING AND FOR ECONOMY AND FINANCE).

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ANOTHER APPOINTMENT WAS THAT OF BUI XUAN BAO AS VICE MINISTER OF EDUCATION. BAO SERVED AS UNDERSECRETARY OF EDUCATION IN THE LOC CABINET, 1967-68. HE IS CURRENTLY DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF LETTERS AT SAIGON UNIVERSITY.

C. COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA REACTION TO CABINET SHUFFLE

BOTH RADIO HANOI AND THE CLANDESTINE "RADIO LIBERATION" HAVE REACTED WITH PREDICABLE VENOM TO THE RVN CABINET CHANGES. AMONG OTHER MALIGN MOTIVES ATTRIBUTED TO PRESIDENT THIEU IN THIS MOVE IS THAT OF "CENTRALIZING ALL POWER IN ORDER TO SERVE AS A US LACKEY" (RADIO LIBERATION FEB 17). THIEU'S INITIATIVE IS ALSO DESCRIBED AS A "DESPERATE MOVE TO SALVAGE HIS COLLAPSING PRESTIGE" (RADIO HANOI FEB 19) AND AS A CLEVER SCHEME "BY THE US" TO "CONSOLIDATE THE THIEU REGIME" (RADIO LIBERATION FEB 19).

D. CONTINUING REACTION TO THE PARACELS-SPRATLY ISSUE

THE CAMPAIGN TO DOCUMENT, PROMOTE, AND EXPLOIT PUBLIC INDIGNATION OVER THE PARACELS-SPRATLY ISSUE CONTINUES. WELL ORGANIZED PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS CONDEMNING THE ATTACKS CONTINUE IN MANY OF THE PRINCIPAL CITIES OF VIETNAM. EIGHTY YEAR OLD VILLAGE ELDERS, WAR INVALIDS, WOMEN, HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, VIETNAMESE LIVING OVERSEAS AS WELL AS VIETNAMESE OF CHINESE EXTRACTION ARE AMONG THOSE REPORTED TO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN PROTESTS AGAINST THE CHINESE COMMUNIST ATTACK ON THE PARACELS. THE RVN IS EMPHASIZING THE ACQUIESCENCE OF THE "PRG" AND DRV TO THEIR PRC "MASTERS". WE BELIEVE THIS AN AN EFFECTIVE RVN PLOY IN DOMESTIC POLITICAL TERMS AND EXPECT THE CAMPAIGN TO CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME.

E. CHINESE PRESS COMMENDED

A FEB 15 EDITORIAL IN DAN CHU, THE NEWSPAPER OF THE DEMOCRACY PARTY, COMMENDED ALL TEN SAIGON CHINESE-LANGUAGE JOURNALS FOR PUBLISHING ON FEB 8 A COMMON EDITORIAL ON THE DISPUTE OVER THE PARACEL AND SPRATLY ISLANDS. THE COMMON EDITORIAL, DAN CHU NOTES, WAS ENTITLED "SUPPORT FOR THE RVN POSITION ON THE PARACEL AND SPRATLY ARCHIPELAGOES" AND ATTACKED THE PRC FOR ITS "BELLICOSE ACTION".

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DAN CHU SAID THAT VIETNAMESE OF ALL ETHNIC ORIGINS, "INCLUDING MILLIONS OF VIETNAMESE OF CHINESE DESCENT", ARE UNITED ON THE ISSUE BUT WARNED THAT "INTERNAL DISSENSION" AND "DIVISION" MUST NOT BE PERMITTED TO "TAKE ROOT IN OUR ANTI-COMMUNIST RANK AND FILE". DAN CHU CONCLUDED THAT THE ALLIED GOVERNMENTS OF

THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA, OF THE PHILIPPINES, AND OF VIETNAM
"ALL AGREE THE QUESTION SHOULD BE RESOLVED IN A PEACEFUL WAY".

II. EXTERNAL

A. GVN/"PRG" BILATERALS STILL ON DEAD CENTER

NO PROGRESS MADE AT 41ST PLENARY SESSION OF THESE TALKS HELD
FEB 15. BOTH SIDES REITERATED PREVIOUS DEMANDS, GVN FOR AGREEMENT
ON A TIMETABLE LEADING TO GENERAL ELECTIONS AND "PRG" FOR
ENFORCEMENT OF CEASEFIRE, RELEASE OF PRISONERS, A
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PRS-01 OMB-01 SS-20 SSO-00 INRE-00 /121 W
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O R 201050Z FEB 74
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1881
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMCONSUL BIEN HOA
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AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
USIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
USDEL JEC PARIS
CIA
DIA
JCS
JUSMAAG

WHITE HOUSE
USAJFKCMA
CINCPAC
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CINCPACFLT
CINCUSARPAC
DEPCHIEF JUSMAAG UDORN
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USDAO/SAIGON

C O N F I D E N T I A SECTION 3 OF 3 SAIGON 02225

BANGKOK ALSO PASS OSA; DEPT ALSO FOR AID/W; CINCPAC FOR POLAD;
DOD PRO USAJFKCMA ATTN: ATCS-WL-DSA

B. IMPORT CREDIT RESTRICTIONS CLAMPED ON

IN AN EFFORT TO HALT THE DECLINE IN GVN'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES, THE NATIONAL BANK THIS WEEK IMPOSED SEVERE NEW RESTRICTIONS ON IMPORT CREDIT. THE NEW REGULATIONS LIMIT COMMERCIAL BANK FINANCING UP TO A MAXIMUM OF 50 PERCENT OF THE VALUE OF COMMODITIES ON THE GOVERNMENT'S "ESSENTIAL" IMPORTS LIST. COMMERCIAL BANK CREDIT FOR NON-ESSENTIAL IMPORTS IS NOW PROHIBITED ALTOGETHER. PREVIOUSLY, BANKS COULD FINANCE UP TO 80 PERCENT OF IMPORT COSTS WITHOUT DISTINCTION AS BETWEEN ESSENTIAL AND NON-ESSENTIAL GOODS. THE NATIONAL BANK NOTED THAT INCREASED FUEL AND FERTILIZER COSTS, COMBINED WITH LOWER-THAN-ANTICIPATED US AND OTHER FOREIGN AID, THREATENED TO DEplete VIETNAM'S RESERVES UNLESS THE BANK TOOK ACTION TO CURB IMPORTS. AS OF FEB. 2, THE BANK REPORTED ITS FOREIGN EXCHANGE AT US\$ 110 MILLION, A DROP OF US\$ 15 MILLION SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR.

THE BANK ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MONITORING THE RESTRICTIONS ON IMPORT CREDIT WILL BE DIFFICULT, BECAUSE COMMERCIAL BANKS CAN SOMETIMES DISGUISE IMPORT CREDIT UNDER OTHER CATEGORIES (E.G. WORKING CAPITAL) IN ORDER TO SATISFY REGULAR CUSTOMERS. BUT SINCE EXPANSION OF OVERALL CREDIT TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR WILL PROBABLY BE RESTRICTED THIS YEAR, THE EFFECT WILL BE TO REDUCE THE AVAILABILITY OF IMPORT FINANCING. PRIVATE BANKING SOURCES EXPECT THE MEASURES TO SUCCEED IN DAMPENING IMPORT DEMAND.

C. JANUARY TAX COLLECTIONS SOAR
THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF TAXATION (DGT) GOT OFF TO AN IMPRESSIVE START IN 1974 WITH JANUARY DOMESTIC RECEIPTS
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REACHING VN\$ 22.1 BILLION, THE HIGHEST MONTHLY COLLECTIONS ON RECORD. THAT REPRESENTS A 231 PERCENT INCREASE OVER JAN. 1973 RECEIPTS OF VN\$6.7 BILLION. EVEN AFTER DISCOUNTING FOR PRICE INFLATION, COLLECTIONS STILL SHOW AN INCREASE OF 103.2 PERCENT IN REAL TERMS. MORE THAN HALF OF JANUARY'S RECEIPTS (VN\$ 13.1 BILLION) WERE INDIRECT TAXES, WHILE DIRECT TAXES ACCOUNTED FOR VN\$ 3.7 BUELION AND SPECIAL PEREQUATION TAXES, VN\$ 4.7 BILLION. A LARGE PART OF JANUARY'S INCREASE WAS DUE TO REVENUES FROM THE SALE OF POL PRODUCTS. RECENT SHARP INCREASES IN OIL PRICES HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY BROADENED THE POL TAX BASE.

D. PRICES

AFTER TWO WEEKS OF STABLE PRICES, THE SAIGON CONSUMER INDEX SPURTED UP 2.8 PERCENT FEB. 18. THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE ADVANCE WERE INCREASES IN ELECTRICITY AND WATER COSTS ANNOUNCED DURING THE WEEK. ELECTRICITY ROSE FROM VN\$ 28.5 TO VN\$ 48 PER KWH, OR A US EQUIVALENT OF 8 CENTS. THE VIETNAM POWER COMPANY DECLARED THAT THE INCREASE WAS DUE ALMOST ENTIRELY TO HIGHER POL COSTS. MEANWHILE, WATER PRICES WENT UP FROM VN\$ 31.5 TO 42 PER CUBIC METER. MODERATELY HIGHER PORK, VEGETABLE AND FISH PRICES NUDGED THE FOOD CATEGORY UP 0.9 PERCENT DURING THE WEEK.

E. BLACK MARKET CURRENCY AND GOLD PRICES

THE GAP BETWEEN SAIGON AND HONG KONG GOLD PRICES CONTINUED TO WIDEN THIS WEEK. WHILE GOLD WAS QUOTED AT US\$144.71 PER TROY OUNCE IN HONG KONG ON FEB. 15, THE PRICE IN SAIGON ON FEB. 18 WAS US\$ 111.79. DURING THE PRECEEDING WEEK, THE HONG KONG PRICE MOVED UP ALMOST \$6 WHILE IN SAIGON THE RATE ROSE BY LESS THAN A DOLLAR. THE CURRENT 22 PERCENT DISCOUNT ON GOLD IN SAIGON SHOULD MAKE IT AN ATTRACTIVE BUY, BUT TIGHT CREDIT CONDITIONS (SEE III B ABOVE) APPEAR TO BE REDUCING DEMAND FOR GOLD. BLACK MARKET PRICES FOR US DOLLARS ALSO REMAINED FLAT DURING THE WEEK, WITH NO PREMIUM OVER THE OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATE OF 575.

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Message Attributes

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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, ECON, VS
To: STATE
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